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National Detector
Dog Manual

Training

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Introduction

The Basic Canine Officer Training (BCOT) course is held at the National Detector Dog Training Center (NDDTC) in Orlando, Florida, and is a requirement for all Canine Officers. The BCOT course is approximately 10 weeks. Students learn the basic skills necessary to perform their duties as Canine Officers. The course is structured to accommodate various pathways of AQI operations including passenger clearance, cargo control, and border control. The well-known Beagle Brigade is the force that works with passenger clearance. Larger breed dogs are used for the border and cargo pathways.

Selection

PPQ officers interested in becoming Canine Officers should request information about the agency's detector dog program and the availability of positions through their port directors. Also, PPQ officers can apply through merit promotion vacancy announcements or lateral transfer announcements. It is now a requirement that new Canine Officers commit to a period of time in the detector dog program.

Port Directors select Canine Officer candidates and notify the RCPC of the selections. The RCPC contacts the NDDTC to schedule training for Canine Officer candidates.

Canine Officers are in the PPQ Officer, 436 series. Therefore, Canine Officer candidates must first meet New Officer Training (NOT) conditions of employment and complete all NOT and port requirements before attending BCOT.

BCOT Requirements

Weekly Evaluations

Each student's progress is evaluated weekly, documented, and reviewed with a trainer. This evaluation is an interactive process with the trainer's role being that of mentor and progress facilitator.

Students must achieve written test scores of at least 80 percent and successfully pass a validation test that demonstrates mastery of practical scent detector dog handling skills. After successfully completing BCOT, Canine Officers must complete annual validation testing.

Training Components

The BCOT course has many components, which are described below.

- ◆ **Pre-course Work**
- ◆ **Week 1**
- ◆ **Weeks 2 Through 5**
- ◆ **Weeks 6 Through 9**
- ◆ **Week 10**
- ◆ **Validation, Graduation, and Departure**

Pre-course Work

Thirty days prior to attending BCOT at the NDDTC, Canine Officer candidates receive an orientation packet with pre-course work. They must complete this work before arriving at the NDDTC.

Week 1

Instruction is held in a traditional classroom environment at the NDDTC. On the first day, students are oriented to the course content, performance expectations, and the NDDTC, as well as with policies covering standards of conduct and dismissal. A vehicle is assigned to the students while attending the course.

During the first week, exams are administered on the pre-course work after a brief review. The following topics are covered during the first week:

- ◆ **Canine Anatomy**
- ◆ **Canine Health**
- ◆ **Canine Behavior**
- ◆ **Safety**
- ◆ **Kennel Procedures**
- ◆ **Abuse**
- ◆ **Rapport Training**

Canine Anatomy	Students learn the basic terminology necessary for discussing canine structures relevant to scent detection work (i.e., olfactory apparatus) and health (e.g., hips, spine, other skeletal landmarks, placement of internal organs). Mastering this terminology is necessary for precise communication about canine health, maintenance, and handling directions.
Canine Health	Instruction covers common canine diseases, parasites, injuries, and conditions. The focus is on preventive care (e.g., routine veterinary care, grooming, kennel hygiene, environmental considerations, maintaining healthy working weight) to avoid health problems that could affect a dog's performance. Students learn to recognize symptoms of health conditions that could have an impact on a dog's performance.
Canine Behavior	Students learn the basics of canine behavior, which is the foundation for all training. This training component covers fundamental concepts relating to canine behavior (e.g., behavioral tendencies, instincts, requirements, treatment, types of conditioning and learning, reward schedules, motivation) as they apply to handling a scent detection canine and troubleshooting performance-related difficulties. Time is devoted to sharpening students' abilities to observe and analyze canine behavior, emphasizing skills that will help them keep their detector dogs safe, healthy, and working proficiently.
Safety	<p>Safety issues relate to both dog and handler in the training environment and beyond, when the detector dog team returns to its port. The primary topics of this component are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ How to avoid accidents through heightened awareness of surroundings◆ How Canine Officers can protect their detector dogs from harm while working around passengers, carts and luggage
Kennel Procedures	Instruction covers kennel procedures (e.g., one-way system, sanitation, exercising dogs, grooming schedules) primarily to keep Canine Officers and their detector dogs from unnecessary injury or stress while attending training at the NDDTC. Permanent kennel environments are unique to each port; however, the hygiene, health, and safety procedures used at the NDDTC are a standard by which students can measure the kennel facilities and procedures at their work locations.
Abuse	This section covers standards for the treatment of detector dogs and guidelines concerning what constitutes abuse or neglect of dogs.
Rapport Training	Upon successful completion of the classroom work and exams, students are assigned their detector dogs. Students begin their new relationships with their detector dogs by learning how to establish a rapport. Activities include hands-on experience such as grooming their dogs (e.g., bathing, cleaning ears, trimming nails).

Weeks 2 Through 5

Instruction is held in a large, training area at the NDDTC. Suitcases, vehicles, and a mail conveyor belt are used to simulate work situations that will be encountered by students when they return to their work locations. The following topics are covered during these four weeks:

- ◆ **Motivation and Rewards**
- ◆ **Teamwork**
- ◆ **Lead Control**
- ◆ **Stimulus Control**
- ◆ **Voice**
- ◆ **Training Exercises**
- ◆ **Search Techniques**
- ◆ **Mail Facility Inspection Training**

Motivation and Rewards

Students learn what motivates their dog and how to reward their dog.

1. Observation—Students learn to observe their dogs to determine what rewards are most likely to elicit or enhance their strong desire, persistence, and enthusiasm to work.
2. Canine preferences—Although the standard reward is food, some dogs perform most effectively when food is combined with other types of rewards or reinforcers (e.g., towel, ball, etc.). Students learn to distinguish between primary and secondary reinforcers and use this information to create a meaningful reward system for their detector dogs.
 - A. Primary—Reinforcers that are intrinsic, based on physical needs (e.g., food, sex, touch) or because of genetic predispositions of the breed (prey drive, visual stimuli).
 - B. Secondary—Reinforcers that are related to conditioning and have a context in which an association has been learned through experience (verbal praise, smiles, toys, etc.).
3. Timing—Students learn the importance of timing in reward delivery.

Teamwork

Teamwork is central to the relationship between dog and handler and is an ongoing experience throughout BCOT. Students must interface with their dogs and their classmates to accomplish daily tasks. This includes delegating tasks, accepting responsibility, and enabling each member of the team to reach his or her potential in performing assigned tasks. The teamwork skills students acquire are applicable to the work environment where a team approach enhances work efficiency, such as working with other inspection personnel in the port. Teamwork is so pivotal to creating successful detector dog teams that it is formally addressed, then applied throughout the course. Students learn to:

1. Delegate canine tasks—In the working detector dog team, the dog is delegated the task of locating target items by its sense of smell. This requires the handler (student) to relinquish control of that task and allow the dog to do its job.
2. Delegate handler tasks—In the working detector dog team, the handler is delegated the tasks of protecting the dog, observing the dog for indications that it has detected odor, and facilitating the dog's efforts to locate an odor source. This activity requires the student to accept responsibility for those tasks.
3. Lead a team—In any team effort, the leader assesses team member potentials, coordinates and delegates tasks, and is ultimately responsible for the safety and effective functioning of the team.
4. Care for kennel as a team—The students work in teams with one another and with animal care technicians, applying their teamwork skills daily when maintaining the training area and performing kennel care responsibilities.

Lead Control

The lead is an important communication device between the handler and the dog. As such, proper deployment of a lead is critical to developing a successful working relationship.

1. Basics—Students learn what types of leads are most appropriate for scent detection work and understand the differences in the types of leads.
2. Techniques—Students learn the proper use of a lead, how to hold a lead and manipulate it to achieve control and communication, how to keep the appropriate tension on the lead, and how to use the lead as a guide to ensure maximum coverage of articles being inspected.

Stimulus Control Students learn how to use certain stimuli to control their dog's behavior. Students learn:

1. Specific commands to elicit behaviors from their dogs.
2. Behaviors of discrimination and generalization and how to balance these two behaviors to achieve optimal detection efficiency.
3. Incidental stimuli that may exert control over a dog's responses (e.g., environment, uniformed handler, and inspection center venue).

Voice Quality, pitch, and tone of voice convey meaningful information to dogs. Students learn the importance of consistency in their use of words, and to identify the effects of different voice qualities. Aspects of voice control include the following:

1. **Commands**—Students learn a specific set of commands or signal words. Since the dogs have already learned to associate these words with performing certain activities, consistent use of these commands will facilitate the transition of the dogs to their new handlers.
2. **Timing**—To become established as a meaningful cue that the dog associates with a behavior, a verbal cue must be delivered at the appropriate time and within a narrow time window. Students learn the logic of contingency as it relates to canine learning.
3. **Obedience**—The willingness of dogs to perform certain tasks can be enhanced by adjusting the tone of voice. Students learn how to apply this skill.
4. **Inflection**—Students learn how to use and emphasize certain sounds to maximize the attention of their dogs.

Training Exercises Students gain experience in how to create valid training exercises by assisting in setting up exercises for the class. These skills and guidelines will apply when students continue training their detector dogs at their work locations. To conduct valid, useful training, students are made aware of the following issues:

1. **Cross contamination**—How to preserve the integrity of the dog's response to specific target odors.
2. **Odors (target/non-target)**—Which odors constitute target, which are non-target, and how to introduce the dog to new odors in training.
3. **Containers**—How to safeguard and protect the integrity of training aids.
4. **Documentation**—Record keeping, using worksheets to track the training progress of the dog.

Search Techniques

Once students have mastered basic presentation skills, they are introduced to techniques that will enhance their work efficiency with their detector dogs. These techniques include the following:

1. Search Patterns—How to move a dog and move with a dog around typical obstacles and luggage to maximize coverage of the search.
2. Breathing Bags—How to assist a dog in detecting odors within luggage by pushing air out of the bags at the appropriate time.
3. Tap Backs—How to provide a dog a second chance to examine a piece of luggage without interrupting the flow of the search.
4. Pinpointing—How to induce a dog to be specific when indicating on an odor source either by touching with its nose or with its paw.

Mail Facility Inspection Training

This training component introduces students to techniques for searching parcel post and packages on a conveyor belt. Even if their work locations have no current plans to use a detector dog team at a mail facility, students will benefit from this training for off-task exercises.

1. Acclimate dog to belt—Dogs must become accustomed to the noise and movement of a conveyor belt and must be comfortable working on the moving surface.
2. Use active response—For increased safety and efficiency, dogs are encouraged to actively indicate by touching or scratching the parcel.
3. Set up exercises—Students learn how to create realistic training scenarios peculiar to the circumstances encountered in mail facilities.

Weeks 6 Through 9

The instruction presented during weeks 6 through 9 is specialized for a detector dog team's application pathway. The training occurs at an international airport, an international border, or an international cargo receiving area that closely simulates the environment in which the detector dog teams will eventually work. During these four instructional weeks, students continue to perfect their skills by applying them to the appropriate environment. The following skills are covered during these four weeks:

- ◆ **Pathway Application**
- ◆ **Troubleshooting**
- ◆ **Travel**
- ◆ **Media**
- ◆ **Monthly Reports**

**Pathway
Application**

This training component might be considered on-the-job training. It occurs in two phases. The first phase is conducted at the NDDTC where procedures peculiar to each scenario are explained and discussed. Role-playing and preparation for public contact expected when the detector dog teams are deployed in the field are reviewed. Paperwork particular to each pathway is reviewed.

The second phase occurs at an international airport, an international border, or an international cargo receiving area where practical handling skills are applied in real-life scenarios.

1. Passenger Clearance

- A.** Students learn how to deal effectively and efficiently with passengers in a Federal Inspection Service facility while maintaining the safety of their detector dogs and themselves. Students learn how to do the following:
 - i.** Work safely—Safety is addressed for both dogs and handlers, and common hazards are described.
 - ii.** Search carts, high/low—Students learn how to present areas during searches and detector dogs learn how to indicate finds of target odors in and around baggage carts.
 - iii.** Interview passengers—Students learn how to safeguard their detector dogs while interviewing passengers, how to ask specific questions to facilitate the interview process, how to verify the contents of baggage, and how to deal diplomatically with difficult passengers.
 - iv.** Recognize residual odors—Target odors in baggage that recently contained agricultural items will elicit a response from detector dogs. Students are instructed in recognizing this type of response.
 - v.** Vary reward schedule—Students learn about the effectiveness of variable reward schedules.
 - vi.** Process paperwork—Students learn how to use PPQ Form 277, Baggage Information Data Card, and how to process Customs Declarations (Customs Form 6059B).
- B.** Students learn how to present their detector dogs to maximize the positive impression of the agency in public relations functions and for media events.

2. Border

- A.** Vehicle or conveyance—Students learn how to search areas of vehicles (e.g., buses, cars, vans, trailers) that are likely to contain contraband.
- B.** Luggage—Students learn how to deploy their detector dogs on luggage and search these after their indications.
- C.** Process paperwork—Students learn how to use PPQ Form 277, Baggage Information Data card and how to process Customs Declarations (Customs Form 6059B).
- D.** Safety and health issues—Students learn about environmental concerns (e.g., temperature, noxious fumes) and their relevance to canine health and safety.

3. Cargo

- A.** Warehouses—Students learn about search patterns and techniques that apply when large, enclosed areas with boxes, bulk stock, and pallets are to be searched.
- B.** Containers—Students learn about special problems that may be encountered with their detector dogs when searching shipping containers containing agricultural items in various conditions (such as in bulk or refrigerated, from ships or trucks).
- C.** Manifests—Students are familiarized with documentation involved in processing cargo and learn how to screen cargo shipments to maximize the effective use of their detector dogs.
- D.** Safety and health issues—Students learn about environmental concerns (e.g., temperature, noxious fumes, stability of stacked boxes and shipping materials) and their relevance to canine health and safety.

Troubleshooting

Students are initially guided through the process of applying the principles of conditioning to correct common work deficiencies or behavioral problems with their detector dogs. They are expected to quickly acquire and apply this skill independently. Following are some of the procedures students are required to learn before returning to their work locations:

- 1.** Problem analysis—Students must examine and identify the elements of behavioral scenarios and scent work challenges. Commonly encountered problems such as regression, distractions, and performance issues are discussed.
- 2.** Corrective action plan—After analyzing a problem, the student will be able to apply principles of conditioning to work towards a solution.

3. Documentation—Students learn how to document problems and corrective measures, and how to identify problems using monthly documentation.
4. Environmental distractions—Students learn to deal with conditions present in the work place, such as physical obstacles, noxious odors, noisy machinery, other animals, air currents, temperature extremes, and unruly passengers.

Travel

Students learn to prepare their detector dogs to travel and return to their work locations. Instructions include necessary paperwork, health examinations, records, flight restrictions, letters of acclimation, equipment needed, recommended temperatures, water, bedding, and types of crates.

Media

Students are given general guidelines for presenting information about the Detector Dog Program, including the Beagle Brigade, and USDA programs to the public. Topics covered include presentation approaches for different age groups (e.g., demonstrations, lectures, and interactive activities), common pitfalls, and access to handouts.

Monthly Reports

Students are taught to enter and manage data to produce monthly reports that are submitted to the RCPC (and NDDTC staff for the first six months).

Week 10

The final week is an assessment of all the skills mastered to ensure the detector dog teams are equipped to meet the mission needs of their work locations. A mock validation exercise is conducted in the beginning of the week followed by a day to correct any deficiencies noted. A final validation exercise is conducted towards the end of the week. Students who pass the validation exercise receive training completion certificates at a graduation ceremony held at the end of the week.

Validation, Graduation, and Departure

Students will participate in the following activities:

1. Mock validation—A validation exercise is set up to familiarize students with the procedure for the practical exam and allow them an opportunity to practice.
2. Proficiency training—Deficiencies noted in the mock validation are addressed and corrected.
3. Validation—The practical exam, in which detector dog teams demonstrate mastery of skills (i.e., handling, safety, behavioral assessment, etc.) and teamwork in a realistic scenario. Students may be re-tested one time (at the discretion of their instructor) if they do not pass the validation test.
4. Graduation (generally held in the location of Validation).

5. Transition to work locations—Students learn how to transfer the skills their detector dogs have acquired to their work locations. Topics covered include: overcoming relocation stress, acclimating to new work environments, handling abuse or interferences, training to overcome regression, increasing endurance, conditioning, documenting team activities, acquiring and maintaining equipment, and establishing local suppliers.
6. The NDDTC staff provides additional support for 6 months after the detector dog team completes BCOT. This support is provided in coordination with the RCPC, who is responsible for installation assessments and follow-up contacts.

Canine Officer Supervisor's Training (COST)

COST is training and orientation developed for supervisors of detector dog teams covering all aspects of managing detector dog teams. The training is scheduled and conducted by a Regional Canine Program Coordinator (RCPC) at the work location.

Training Objective

The objective is to provide standardized training and orientation to supervisors of detector dog teams.

Estimated Time

The duration of training is from 12-16 hours depending on class size and whether training will also be presented to PPQ officers. See [PPQ Officer Training](#).

Training Materials

The following materials are used in training:

- ◆ Instructor Guide for Canine Officer Supervisor's Training
- ◆ Set of overheads
- ◆ Set of handouts
- ◆ *National Detector Dog Manual*

Training Topics

The following topics are covered in the training:

- ◆ Roles and responsibilities that support the Detector Dog Program
- ◆ Work expectations and team development
- ◆ Utilization of detector dog teams
- ◆ Equipment and supplies
- ◆ Veterinarian requirements
- ◆ Proficiency training
- ◆ Outreach information and responding to the media
- ◆ Documentation and reporting

PPQ Officer Training

Training and orientation developed for PPQ Officers who are coworkers of detector dog teams. The training is scheduled and conducted by an RCPC at the work location.

Training Objective

Provide standardized training and orientation to coworkers of detector dog teams.

Estimated Time

The duration of training is from 1-2 hours depending on class size and whether training will also be presented to supervisors. See [**Canine Officer Supervisor's Training \(COST\)**](#).

Training Materials

- ◆ Instructor Guide for PPQ Officer Training
- ◆ Set of overheads
- ◆ Set of handouts
- ◆ *National Detector Dog Manual*

Training Topics

The following topics are covered in the training:

- ◆ Roles and responsibilities that support the Detector Dog Program
- ◆ Utilizing detector dog teams